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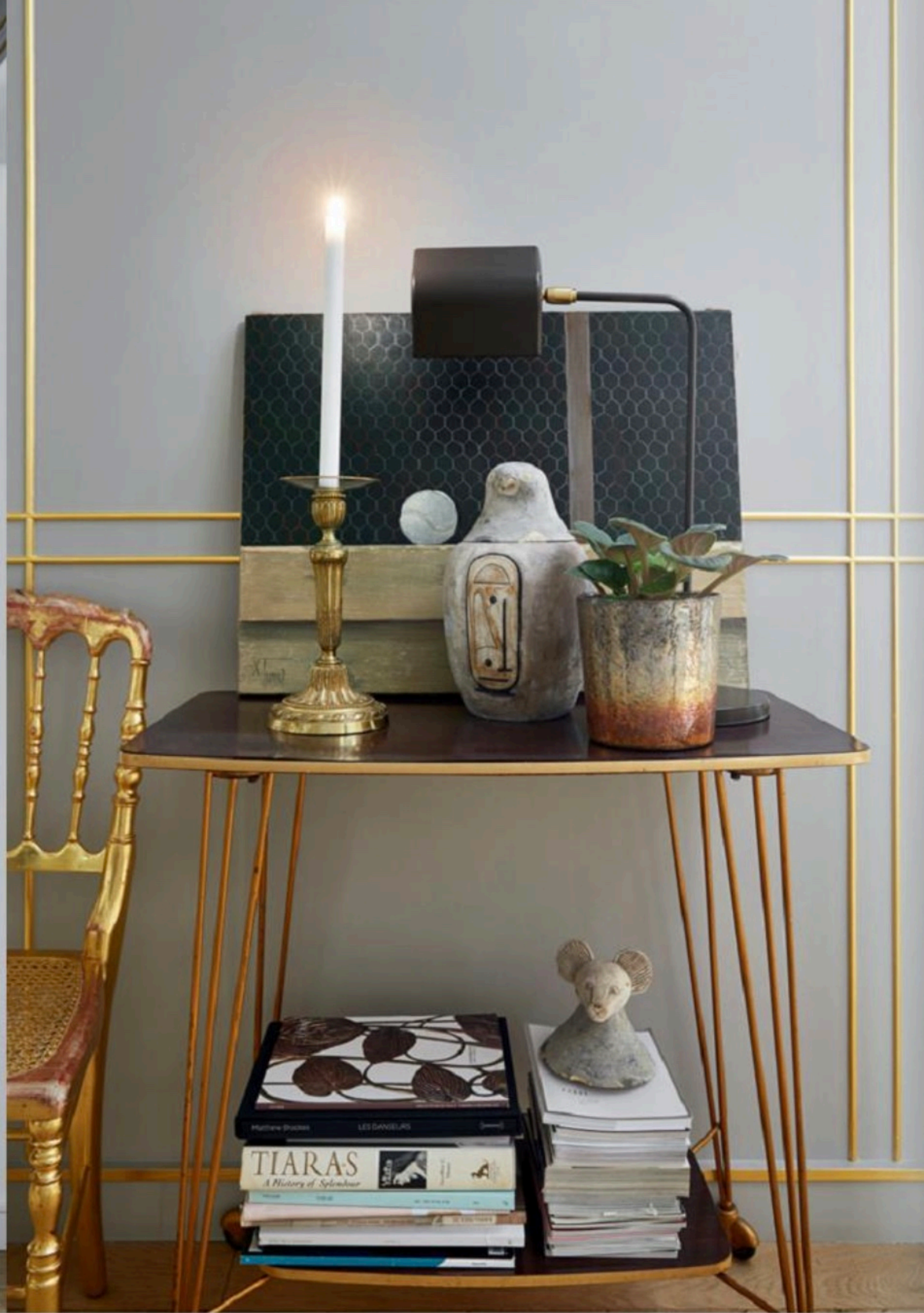
Couturier
Alexis
Mabille's
colourful Paris
apartment has
inspired a
foray into
furniture
making

Words Gay Gassman
Photography Francis Amiard





The main salon is anchored by three Mabilie-designed sofas covered in accessories made from repurposed tapestries he sources at flea markets. The photograph against the wall is by Gilles Bensimon.



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HE FASHION DESIGNER ALEXIS MABILLE GREW up in a creative French family of architects, painters and musicians, so it comes as little surprise that he lives in an apartment full of art, flea market finds and furniture he designed himself. Located in the trendy 9th arrondissement of Paris, the light-filled, late-18th-century apartment

took Mabilie about six months to renovate.

"I had always lived in the first quarter of Paris, until now. I love the history of this part of Paris and I was looking for a place to completely redo and fix up," says Mabilie, 42. His wish came true when he found a listing for this high-ceilinged residence. "I wanted a blank page," he adds. "Everything has been redone except for one mantel, a door and a part of the ceiling."

Mabilie worked closely on the extensive renovation with architect friends Emil Humbert and Christophe

ABOVE FROM LEFT: Mabilie 'stole' the idea for the thin gold wall and door detailing from the Louvre; the Napoleon III gilded chair once belonged to Christian Dior. On the hall table is a painting by Xavier Tronel and an antique Egyptian vase.

Poyet of the Monaco-based firm Humbert & Poyet, who also designed his mirrored art deco-style shop in the 7th arrondissement. Although the project was not really in Humbert & Poyet's typical style, Mabilie comments that 'we collaborated to combine my world with theirs'.

Creative collaboration is something he has grown up with; as a teenager he accompanied his uncle, the interior architect Patrice Nourissat, on trips to Parisian flea markets in search of vintage treasures. An aunt, meanwhile, had a stash of 19th-century clothes which she allowed him to pillage and use to make ornate costumes using the faded velvets, frilled petticoats and antique lace. His talent for transforming them into desirable new pieces led to commissions for bridal gowns, which he sewed with the help of his mother. "I grew up with a love for pretty things and was always in the attic finding an old chair or something like that," he says. "I think if I wasn't a fashion designer, I would be an interior decorator."

In the early Nineties, Mabilie secured a place at the prestigious École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne before working at Christian Dior for almost a decade. In 2005, he launched his own fashion label,



which has grown to include women's ready-to-wear, haute couture and bridal. The brightly coloured tailoring, whimsical day dresses and red carpet gowns give historical silhouettes and detailing a contemporary spin.

Mabille took a similar approach to revamping his Paris apartment, drawing inspiration from the original floor plans. The restored architectural features – neoclassical ceiling mouldings, tall panelled doors – are also largely authentic to the post-Revolution Directoire period, when the opulence of the Louis XVI look was becoming more subdued, with less gilding, simpler wooden carvings and more practical materials than silk.

The floors have been laid in a traditional chevron pattern throughout, but in unexpected pairings of materials (some in dark and pale wood, others in black-and-white marble). Fittingly, the hallway is painted Dior grey and features a Napoleon III gilded chair that once belonged to Christian Dior himself. Furnishings are a mix of vintage finds, family heirlooms and contemporary pieces.

Mabille particularly loves how the layout is completely symmetrical. There are no curtains in any rooms except the bedroom, flooding the apartment with natural light.

ABOVE FROM LEFT: Mabille wanted all of his books in the master bedroom interspersed with drawings and collages; this bathroom, formerly the kitchen, is now a mix of 'art deco, empire, and the 1940s,' says Mabille. He sits in the tub and works most mornings.

The designer hosts a great deal and eschews electric lighting in the evening, using candles to add to the romantic feel of the space.

"I was so excited about this project, I went to visit the site every morning and every night," adds Mabille. "I wanted to give back the original history to this place. We recreated all the mouldings and boiserie. The only new touch was the floors, which I designed, inspired by [the 20th-century French designer Jean] Royère."

He also designed some of the most striking furniture in the apartment – sofas covered with a patchwork of vibrant tapestries found in French and English flea markets. They inspired a small series of furniture pieces, which are available by commission via the Parisian design dealer Aurelie Julien. Mabille has long made custom furniture for friends ("I want to know who it's going home with," he quips) and also turned his hand to interior design at the Belle Époque-inspired restaurant-club, Froufrou, housed at the Edouard VII theatre in Paris. When nudged a bit more about his future endeavours, Mabille smiles and says, "Why not furniture like haute couture?" Why not indeed. alexismabille.com





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If I wasn't a fashion designer, I would
be a decorator. Why not furniture
like haute couture?
”

ABOVE: The shelf contains a diverse collection of personal items like the Adrien Dirand photograph, two Alberto Giacometti plaster heads, and Wedgwood pottery. OPPOSITE PAGE: When he entertains, Mabilie fills the kitchen sink with flowers and uses the counter as a serving surface. The chandelier is 1960s Italian.

OPPOSITE PAGE: In the dining room, Syrian chairs wrap around a large table, while an 18th century-inspired Baccarat chandelier hangs above.